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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 002171

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT ENDS ITS EXTRAORDINARY SESSION;  
CONSERVATIVES LARGELY DETERMINE THE OUTCOMES

REF: A. AMMAN 1569  
[1](#)B. 07 AMMAN 4638  
[1](#)C. AMMAN 1465  
[1](#)D. AMMAN 1533  
[1](#)E. AMMAN 1871  
[1](#)F. AMMAN 2062  
[1](#)G. AMMAN 1903  
[1](#)H. AMMAN 1571  
[1](#)I. AMMAN 1834  
[1](#)J. AMMAN 1984

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel Rubinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Jordanian parliament closed its extraordinary session on July 9, having passed all but one of the bills placed before it by the King and the government. The session provided the first true insight into voting blocs and policy preferences in the lower house. Tribal conservatives demonstrated their dominance of the body. Younger, business-oriented MPs voted with the government on most issues. Leftists and Islamists joined forces to oppose several pieces of legislation, with little effect. In the end, most bills passed without amendments. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On July 9, parliament ended a productive month-long extraordinary session in which it passed laws on a variety of key political and economic issues. Several pieces of complicated or controversial legislation originally slated to appear in the extraordinary session were cut from the agenda at the last minute as the government sought more time to fine tune their contents (Ref A). These bills, which include social security reform and a much-watched landlords and tenants law, will appear in the ordinary session in October.

[1](#)3. (C) Until this session, the fifteenth Jordanian parliament had been immersed in procedural questions and circular debate on current affairs, rather than moving forward on a legislative agenda. The relative inexperience of most MPs also made it difficult to gauge the policy priorities of the lower house as a whole (Ref B). The extraordinary session, in which MPs were only allowed to discuss a government-determined agenda, was the first real snapshot of where legislators stand on concrete policy issues. The extraordinary session demonstrated that unlike the previous parliament (2005-2007), known for its zeal in blocking economic reform, the current members of the lower house are far more willing to follow the government's lead.

Tribal Conservatives Flex Their Muscles  
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[1](#)4. (C) In marked contrast to their highly deliberative and lackadaisical approach during the regular session, tribal MPs were prodded by speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali to move on laws that mattered to the government during the extraordinary

session. It was this bloc that pushed through laws on public gatherings and civil society which were widely criticized by civil society as missed opportunities for reform (Refs C-G).

¶15. (C) While there was considerable public and parliamentary debate over the legislative agenda during the session, Majali used his control of the committee chairs, who depend on him for their positions, to ensure the passage of controversial legislation without major changes. In the case of several laws (including those on public gatherings and associations), civil society and opposition MPs were invited to voice dissent and propose sweeping amendments in private committee sessions (Ref E). In post's discussions with civil society leaders, it was clear that these sessions raised hopes among activists and reformers that their voices would have an influence on policymakers. When these bills later came up for a final vote in the committee and on the floor, however, amendments were soundly defeated and legislation went forward for the most part as prepared by the government. This outcome has left many of Post's civil society contacts dejected and scratching their heads over the multiple lobbying defeats they suffered over the course of the session.

#### Shifting Alliances

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¶16. (C) Tribal MPs were frequently joined during the voting on several key measures by the young, business-oriented MPs, who for the most part displayed an interest in economic reform but little in further political liberalization. From our discussions with these MPs, it is clear that many of them believe that maintaining stability in Jordan is more important than expanding civil liberties during a time of economic crisis. In addition, many of them have voiced to poloff in recent weeks a key lesson they have learned of

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parliamentary behavior: closeness to the government will increase their ability to bring spoils back home for their own constituents.

¶17. (C) The session also marked the rise of a coalition of convenience between leftists and Islamists. In the debate over the public gatherings and associations laws, the six-member bloc of Islamic Action Front (IAF) deputies were often seconded in their vocal criticism by prominent leftist deputies from the wealthier districts of Amman. The political calculus of the two sides differed wildly - Islamists opposed these laws as a direct affront on their ability to operate in Jordan (Ref G), while leftists opposed them on the more general principle that people should be free to voice their opinions. Still, the fact that they worked together shows that among some MPs, political interests can lead to alliances of convenience.

#### Parliament's Tote Board

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¶18. (C) Part of the reason this extraordinary session was so productive is that the government excluded complicated legislation from the agenda, out of recognition that deliberating on difficult issues such as the social security and landlords and tenants law would have extended the session unnecessarily. In many cases during the extraordinary session, parliament had to deal with existing provisional legislation enacted between 2001 and 2003 before passing new statutes, so as to avoid a conflict of laws (Ref I). For the most part, parliament passed the laws before it with few changes - the "minor amendments" listed for some laws below are for the most part grammatical changes. The Senate endorsed all of the legislation which came before it with no further changes.

Public Health Law - the parliament annulled two previous statutes, and approved a provisional statute from 2002 with some minor amendments.

Gendarmerie Law - passed with minor amendments.

Public Gatherings Law (Refs D and E) - passed with an amendment which shortened the time necessary to ask permission from the governor for a public demonstration from seventy-two to forty-eight hours.

Vocational Training Law - the parliament annulled a provisional law from 2001 and passed a replacement statute with minor amendments.

Jordan Investment Corporation Law - this law, which dissolved the JIC, passed with minor amendments.

Finance Leasing Law - parliament annulled two provisional laws from 2002 and 2003, and passed a substitute law with minor amendments.

Law on the Rights of the Disabled - passed with minor amendments.

Jordan Maritime Authority Law - passed without amendment.

Jordan Food and Drug Administration Law - this provisional law from 2003 was passed without amendment.

Transportation and Traffic Laws - two previous statutes were annulled, and two alternate statutes were passed with some changes to the prescribed fines and jail times for violators.

Annulment of the Ports Law - passed without amendment.

Labor Law Amendments - the government decided to delay thirty-eight amendments until the regular session in October. Of the remaining six amendments, four passed. An amendment concerning the ability of foreigners to join unions was rejected, but Ministry of Labor officials have expressed their intention to revive the issue in the regular session. Another amendment to decrease the number of public holidays was also rejected.

Law on Associations (Refs C and F) - consolidated the NGO registration process in the Ministry of Social Development, and was amended to require cabinet approval (vice approval from the Minister for Social Development) for transfers of funding to Jordanian civil society organizations from any foreign source.

Budgetary Supplement (Ref G) - passed with minor adjustments.

Companies' Law - passed with minor amendments.

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Chamber of Agriculture Law (Ref H) - came to the floor, but was delayed until the October ordinary session and referred back to committee.

By-Law Changes - delayed until the ordinary session, as they were not on the agenda submitted by the King.  
Rubinstein